

The "Betting Fool" and His Bad Money by Chief Flynn

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CASE IX.

I WONDER how many of the old timers who used to make book at the Gravesend racetrack will remember the Betting Fool? And how many of you who knew the Delmar, Sheepshead Bay and Morris Park tracks eighteen and twenty years ago can recall this same Betting Fool, who was variously known as Count de Cash, Hundred Dollar Billy, the Millionaire Kid and Klondike?

Not so many? Ah, well, we do like to forget the foolish things we did. Possibly the name of Morris Kramer will jog the memory. At any rate, whether they care to admit it or not, there are many of the old boys who haven't forgotten him; never will, either.

After all, it doesn't make much difference whether they admit remembering or not. The facts are the same. Besides, you can understand a bookmaker refusing to admit remembering he was ever so completely befuddled and generally bunched by a dapper youth who looked like the most guileless of woolly lambs.

He would arrive at the track looking as though he had been carried there in a dustproof container; a sartorial masterpiece. A pearl gray derby banded and edged with black, the tallest collar in the world, a radiant cravat fighting for supremacy with a waistcoat of noble design. Never the same suit twice at the same track. His tailor must have been a happy genius.

His women folk, and I have in mind one girl in particular, must have been selected by him as adequate settings for his own splendor. There were three of four of them seen with him most, but of this one girl I should like to speak at length. I shall not, because she plays but a minor part in the story; but what a beautiful thing she was! It was very difficult, I assure you, to believe that she was one of Kramer's tools, and yet, although we never arrested her, simply because we never found her, it is impossible that she wasn't as guilty as he.

How She Passed Bad Bills
With Her Dazzling Smiles

Poppy Edgerton, they called her, and she used to have the betting commissioners falling out of their seats when she would come tripping in with a nice new \$100 bill to place on Myosotis or Nimble or Misunderstood.

"You are so kind," she'd say to the commissioner who appeared to have fallen hardest. "If you don't mind, I think I'll just place \$10 on Misunderstood, she's such a beautiful lady horse and I have a hunch that she is misunderstood and that she'll win."

And the wabbling gentleman would hand her \$90 change and mark her ticket.

Women were barred from the betting ring, so her prey were the commissioners. "Thank you, so much," she would coo, walking off with her perfectly good \$90, while he folded up her excellent imitation of \$100, which she had received from the Betting Fool.

But I'll get back on the track. It was just about eighteen or twenty years ago that Kramer appeared at Gravesend. He would enter the betting ring when the crowd was most numerous and place \$50 on the horse against which the odds were longest. Usually he played his horses to win. He didn't bother much with guesses at second and third places. Occasionally he would play a nag for place or to show, but for the most part he stuck to picking winners.

Once in a while he'd bet on the favorite, but, to repeat, his favorite game was to place his money on a long shot. The crowd would be heavy, the work fast, the excitement high. He would receive his change and ticket, move on to the next stall and back another horse.

It really didn't matter very much. Any horse would do so long as it was in that particular race. He would slip the bookmaker or the cashier a \$100 bank note, take his change and—well, you cannot imagine anything simpler. That excellent imitation of a bank note would be lost in circulation before the next race was run.

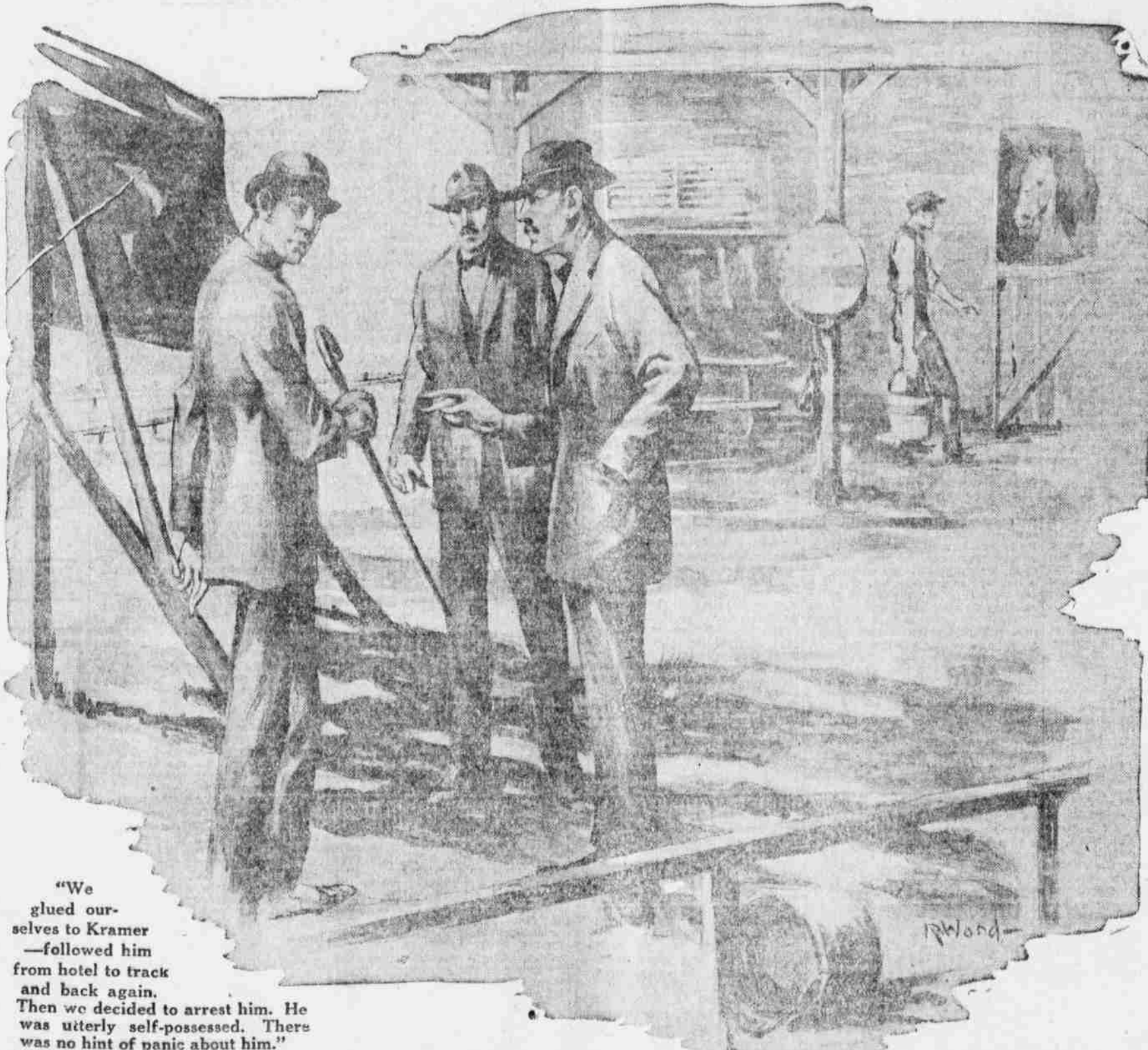
Almost Impossible to Trace
Once It Was Circulated

Eventually it would be discovered. Where did it come from? That was one of the questions the Secret Service was being asked every day. There were counterfeiters and counterfeiters. There was no reason, of course, to suspect the Betting Fool. He was just a nut with plenty of money and the Poppy—Poppy Edgerton, his beautiful sweetheart.

It took more than that sort of a combination to amaze the tracks those days. Even Kramer's elegance failed to impress. There were a number of bewildering dressers in that era of the American race track. Poppy's loveliness was the most lasting of the combination's effects.

To be sure, Kramer would not overdo the thing. He moved from track to track and there might have been whole weeks when he was seen at none of them. There were other ways of spending one's time. There were other methods of getting rid of deceptive replicas of bank notes. Kramer was shrewd. He possessed a fair education and much native intelligence. He operated for a couple of years without incurring suspicion.

It is fair to assume that he was more or



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less well known at all the tracks in America. It is possible, too, that the English tracks knew him, although that would have been much more difficult for him, and, after all, his love for racing was not a sincere one. He cared nothing for the track and the sport as such. He had arrived at the conclusion that the betting ring was his best medium of circulation and he was pretty much right about it. He, like others, was tripped up in time, but he got away with it more freely than the majority of counterfeiters.

During the two years in which he was operating the United States Secret Service came to know that something more than \$25,000 in counterfeit \$100 bills had been let loose upon the public. Some of them had circulated far; had come into and gone out of banks. Some had been detected the moment they were pushed into the teller's hands.

The stream of the spurious bank notes was more or less continuous. For a while we kept quiet about it for reasons of our own and then we began to ask the public to watch for the notes. Naturally the vigil was most rigid where bills of large denomination were commonest.

Even Experts Disagreed
When Asked About Them

There were admirably executed bills. The experts became embroiled when asked to discriminate between them and genuine ones. It required a keen eye and a powerful glass, but once you knew, the defect was plain. They were all of the issue of gold certificates dated July 12, 1932, with the engraving of Benton upon them—check letter 3, plate 6, series C-424363—to be specific.

But under the glass you could observe an error in the Benton nose. The aquiline contour was untrue, a slight falseness of curve. It was not an accurate likeness of Mr. Benton's nose, that's all there is to it, but I'd defy you to detect it offhand.

Of course it was not that slight error in Mr. Benton's face that accomplished Kramer's downfall. That merely verified suspicion raised by the peculiar feel of the paper. The paper did not crinkle as it should have. It lacked body. I know of but one counterfeiter who ever made bank note paper so expertly that the makers of the genuine failed to tell which was theirs and which was his. And that bright young man we clapped into a Federal prison on the Pacific coast.

A dozen secret service men were riding around the country seeking information regarding this steady flow of bad money. And finally, as so often happens, we received our chance from a source we had not suspected. From the Gravesend track we got word that five suspicious \$100 bills had been taken in there that day. They were not at all certain who had passed them, but the bookmakers appeared to want to accuse Kramer, the Betting Fool—and the adorable Poppy.

They had had a big day. Many of them

had handled as much as \$10,000 or \$20,000. How could they be certain who had handed them a single \$100 bill? Nevertheless, now that they came to think of it, Kramer had gained some distinction for his weakness for bills of that denomination.

So had Poppy. It was rather thin going, this meager suspicion, but it was better than nothing. Inasmuch as we had nothing else to work on we decided to watch this Betting Fool and his ravishing sweetheart.

Large Amounts Were Wagered,
So Details Were Forgotten

Those were rather hectic days at the tracks. Such horses as Orthodox, Hermes, Voter, Dolly Spanker, Chucanunda and Delhi were running and enormous wagers were laid. Money commanded little respect, judging by the way those who had any of it took chances with it. The bookmakers and the betting commissioners were always in something of a frenzy and mere incidents were forgotten over night.

Nevertheless we questioned the bookmakers and commissioners and arrived at the conclusion that at least \$5,000 in suspicious looking bills had passed around the ring that meet at Gravesend. Moreover, the other bookmakers and commissioners were inclined to agree with the growing suspicion that Kramer and the bills always seemed to appear simultaneously. That there had not been a complaint before is explained in the words of one of the gamblers.

"Yes," he said, "I wouldn't be at all surprised if we handled some of the stuff every day, but we work fast. The money comes in and it goes out. Money circulates faster here than anywhere in the world. There is no time to make minute examinations of every bill you receive."

But they all appeared to agree that Kramer specialized on \$100 bills. They had never given it a thought before, but now it did strike them as odd. And he never bet a full hundred—always twenty-five or fifty. He always got change for his bill. His betting was wild too. Suggested the man who was willing to throw away money just for the pleasure of betting.

You can see the scantiness of the case against Kramer. But, as I have said, it was all we had and we worked on it. We followed him to St. Louis and to the Delmar track and, sure enough, bogus \$100 bills began to appear just as soon as he began operating there.

We glued ourselves to Kramer—followed him from hotel to track and back again. Querily enough, Poppy was not with him. We located her out on the coast and she is alleged to have told friends that she was through with Kramer and was going on the stage. Be that as it may, we did not see her again. Kramer was working the Delmar track alone.

We arranged with bookmakers to let us take any \$100 bills he might hand them. Please remember that we had nothing on

him at all so far as the Eastern tracks were concerned. That he might be passing bad money in St. Louis was not proof that he had been doing so in New York, despite the coincidence.

Presently we saw him go to a bookmaker's stall and place a bet. The gambler raised his finger and we were handed a \$100 bill just given the gambler by Kramer. He went to another stall. We followed. Again he passed in a century note and once more we came into possession of it. Three more times that happened that day. He had laid \$25 bets each time, receiving in all \$375 in good money. I do not remember whether he won any of those bets.

Found They Were Spurious
And Then Arrested Him

Two of us kept Kramer under observation all that night. The rest of us verified our suspicions that all these bills he had passed in through the bookmaker wickets were counterfeit. Moreover, they were products of the same plates that had turned out those found in New York. Making an arrest might have been a simple matter right then, but we decided to wait, thinking to catch his associates if he had any.

We watched for several days, but no associates appeared, and then we decided to arrest Kramer before he should become suspicious and escape. He was utterly self-possessed. There was not the slightest suggestion of panic about him. In the event tones he said:

"There is a mistake, of course, and aren't you running the risk of making trouble for yourselves by arresting an innocent man?" "Well," I told him, "we have decided to take chances. We have here fifteen bogus hundred dollar bills you have given bookmakers. We know also that what with a few wins and the change you have received from the gamblers you have in your possession at least \$1,200 in good money."

"Counterfeit bills?" he replied. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Well, that is unfortunate," he exclaimed, plunging his hand into a pocket. "Here examine these—twenty-eight of them. Possibly they are counterfeit too. Lord, this is embarrassing."

"Yes," I agreed, "it is. And these are counterfeit. Moreover, they are the same counterfeits that were circulated at Gravesend. You know Gravesend, don't you?" He didn't choose to reply directly, but said:

"Look here; come to my hotel and I'll show you something of even greater interest."

He did. In his room he produced a suit case containing \$4,700 in genuine money and five more counterfeit \$100 bills. He had already handed us twenty-eight of them.

"See this?" he said, handing one of the Secret Service men a newspaper opened at the classified advertisements. "Read that."

We read an advertisement which an-

nounced that a packet of money had been found in Union Station and that the owner might have it by applying to "G. B. Repulse."

"I inserted that ad," explained Kramer. "You see I just got into town two weeks ago and I found this manilla envelope containing this money as I was coming in through Union Station. I advertised, received no claim and had decided to keep on advertising until the owner was located."

"Personally \$3,300 doesn't interest me. I have plenty. I like to play the races and I simply used this loose money rather than go to my bank for cash. If the owner appears I should give him my check."

And then he gave us references, regarding himself—all of them in a large New England city. The story was plausible. There was nothing about his demeanor that would warrant our growing more suspicious. Still there was that coincidence—\$100 bills at Gravesend and \$100 bills at Delmar. The trouble was we didn't have the evidence at Gravesend.

We took a long chance after consulting Washington and held Kramer. He was quite docile about it—said that he understood how careful we had to be.

"But why not permit me to stay at a hotel?" he said. "One of your men can remain with me. I shall be glad to pay his expenses."

It would be difficult to be fairer than that.

We had Kramer's credentials looked up. One of our men went to this New England city and returned saying that he was somewhat puzzled by the fact that Kramer had not been elected Mayor. Bankers, clergymen and merchants gave him warm praise. They scoffed at the idea that he was even suspected of lawbreaking. They said that he would be able to clear up all the mystery and that if guarantees were necessary they would post any amount of money.

Then, too, it was discovered that there was a young woman in this town to whom Kramer was engaged to be married. She was a splendid type—a school teacher and quite active in the women's clubs of the community. I believe she had organized several settlement centers for child welfare work.

His Perfect Explanation
Had Authorities Worried

In the face of all this we were becoming a bit groggy. He had most plausibly explained his possession of the thirty-three bogus bills. To make affairs more complicated for us, one of our men, doing a bit of inquiry about Union Station in St. Louis, came upon a traveling bag in the checking room which bore the name of Lewis Glenn, but no address.

I'm not prepared to say just why the Secret Service men's suspicions centered upon that bag. I fail to remember, if I ever knew. At any rate, they opened it and found therein a number of articles of men's clothing and 100 more of the \$100 counterfeits.

"I'm sure you're no more amazed than I

was when you arrested me," was Kramer's comment. "I'd suggest you find this fellow Glenn and release me. My affairs need my personal attention."

But we could not forget the simultaneous presence of Kramer and the counterfeits in New York. And we couldn't explain the suspicious of the bookmakers. There was too much coincidence about the whole affair. We were drifting, I'll admit, but eventually we drifted into the right channel.

The investigation in the New England city led other Secret Service men to Boston. There we discovered that Kramer had established an engraving business that had been netting him an income of nearly \$8,000 a year. But we were unable to locate his boasted source of great wealth. A man with an income of \$8,000 can't play the races as Kramer had been betting. Even in those days he couldn't have done it.

We could have had Kramer arraigned on a charge of passing counterfeit money, of course, but we didn't have a thing to offer a jury. It would have been up to us, as usual, to prove him guilty of knowingly circulating the stuff. We couldn't muster anything like sufficient evidence of that. The case was going to pieces. We were considering abandoning it.

Heard of Another Ad
Of Money Being Found

But just as we were about to do just that news came from New York that about two months before an advertisement appeared in one of the newspapers there reading to the effect that packet of money had been found in Grand Central Terminal and that the owner might have it by describing it.

We held a consultation and communicated again with the Secretary of the Treasury. We took a long, long chance and took Kramer before a United States Commissioner. We had him locked up to await further investigation. The Commissioner set his bond at \$50,000, and that sum was too much for his enthusiastic friends. They came to the decision that there must be something wrong with a man the Government was so anxious to hold. Therefore he remained in jail.

And then the first bit of luck we had came to us. We had the original advertisement as written for publication in the St. Louis newspaper. We took that to New York and induced the advertising manager of the newspaper there to make a search for the original of the advertisement appearing in his columns.

Our luck was sustained. The original was found. Just why they had saved it requires more explaining than I am able to produce.

The handwriting of the man inserting the advertisement in the New York newspaper was identical with that on the advertising blank for the St. Louis journal. We showed them to Kramer.

"You seem to be determined to prove me a counterfeiter," he said. "Suppose you do it without my assistance."

We were so much encouraged that we went back to the New England city that held Kramer in such high esteem. We devoted a day to Kramer's home. We did everything except remove the wallpaper. We even took framed pictures apart—removed the backs and examined the photographs and prints.

One of them was a print of Whistler's picture of his mother. I shall not forget the subject of that picture. Between the actual print and the cardboard back of it we found a storage receipt issued by Oliver Johnson & Son to Orville Clark.

Found the Complete Plant
In Storage Warehouse

In the boxes, trunks and barrels stored there by Orville Clark we found two hundred of our familiar counterfeit hundred dollar bills. Likewise we found the plate from which they had been made—and the presses and the ink and a quantity of the paper on which they had been printed. In short we found a complete counterfeiting layout, with some of the finished product.

Kramer confessed a couple of weeks later. He did it with all his wonted nonchalance.

"I might as well tell you," he said. "I'm getting rather tired of all this anyway. I don't think I can stand the long wrangling of a trial. I'm guilty."

They sent him to jail for fifteen years. He had been in prison for about a year and a half when the school teacher to whom he had been engaged came to see me.

"I have married since Kramer went to prison," she said. "I want you to understand that it was impossible for me to be loyal to him after that. But he has written me a letter in which he says that he counterfeited in order to accumulate money enough to make me comfortable and to give me luxuries after the wedding."

"That makes me feel responsible. I understand there were other women and I understand that he may have been lying, but the chance that he may have told the truth in this letter troubles me. I have spoken to my husband about what I am trying to do and he agrees with me."

"I want to know what I can do to have his sentence reduced. I am certain he will make good as an honest citizen if liberated."

This young woman went so far as to write the President. I was asked for an opinion and the result was that Kramer was paroled after serving six years. I have heard he is back home and has prospered. There is no secret about his past. It is generally known, but he has been a good, useful citizen and the past appears to have been forgotten.